

A History of St. Mark's Anglican Cemetery, New Perlican



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St. Mark's Anglican Cemetery is located at Scott's Hill, also once known as Church Hill, in New Perlican, Trinity Bay, NL (47°54'36.4"N 53°21'38.2"W). This grassy plot of land overlooks the ocean and contains many grave markers. Of the markers that have been uncovered and documented, most record death dates from the mid to late 1800s. Names recorded on extant grave markers include members of the Bickford, Hobbs, Howell, Merchant, Mitchell, Northover, Pittman, Pitts, Seward, Swansborough and Warren families.

While all the inscribed stones date from the 19th century, the majority of markers in the burial grounds are of unmarked fieldstone. These stones may represent earlier burials, though further research is needed.

New Perlican was established as a small fishing base by the mid-1600s, making it one of the oldest fishing stations in Trinity Bay. As early as 1620, Thomas Rowley, who was then living at Cupers Cove (Cupids), wrote of his plans to settle "near Harts Content...att New Pernecan." Archaeologist William (Bill) Gilbert has conducted several seasons of excavations in the community at what is known at the Hefford Plantation (Borden Site Number CIAi-4). Gilbert (2007:104) writes that the Plantation "was first settled by William Hefford and his family in 1675 and appears to have been occupied continually since that time." This plantation is "thought to be the oldest in Canada that is still inhabited by the descendants of the first settlers" (Matthews 24).

By 1677 William Hefford had built a “dwelling house [and] nine store rooms and lodging houses” at New Perlican, and excavations in 2003 uncovered a William III ha’penny minted sometime between 1695 and 1698 and a seventeenth-century padlock (Gilbert 2004:16). Work the following year recovered a Spanish American silver one real coin manufactured in Potosi in what is now Bolivia, dated to circa 1653 (Gilbert 2005:18). Selections of these artifacts are on loan from the Baccalieu Trail Heritage Corporation to Heritage New Perlican and can be seen during open hours at the Town of New Perlican office.

Much of the recovered archaeological material shows links back to Devon, England, and a number of the early inhabitants may have had connection to the Church of England, though there was no formal church in the community during its first phase of settlement. Hatton and Harvey (465) note:

It was not till 1703 that any organised effort was made on the part of the Church of England to supply the spiritual wants of its adherents, who, in considerable numbers, were settled on the shores of the island. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was established in 1701, and their attention was at once directed to Newfoundland. At that time there was but one Protestant -clergyman in the island—a Mr. Jackson, who was in St. John's. The society adopted him as its missionary, and gave him a salary of 50 pounds. per annum. The efforts of the society were gradually extended year after year, and more missionaries were sent as the population increased. Conception, Trinity, and Bonavista bays were the seats of the early missions of the Church of England. Churches were built in St. John's, Harbour Grace, Carbonear, Old and New Perlican.

Hatton and Harvey do not reference the date of a possible 18th-century church in New Perlican, but it was clearly a site of Anglican outreach at that time. John Langtry, Rector of St. Luke's, Toronto, and Prolocutor of the Provincial Synod of Canada, noted the following:

In 1765, the Rev. James Balfour was appointed missionary at Trinity Bay, with the out-harbours of Old and New Perlican and Bonavista. After nine years labour here, he was removed to the more important station of Harbour Grace, the population of which he reports as consisting of 4462 Protestants and 1306 Roman Catholics, the number of communicants at almost 200. He was succeeded in the mission of Trinity Bay by the Rev. John Clinch, who laboured there for many years.

Balfour, apparently, was somewhat unimpressed with New Perlican, and complained that its families were "in a state of war with each other." New Perlican fared better in his estimation than nearby Scylly Cove (Winterton) which he described as "a most barbarous and lawless place" (qtd in Hancock 135).

New Perlican contains a few private or family burial sites, including the Jane Condon grave site, dating to circa 1816. The grave is located in a meadow at the end of Gut Road in Vitter's Cove. As of 2018, the meadow belonged to Betty Callahan Simmons – a direct descendant of Cornelius Callahan, who was among the first settlers to the Vitter's Cove area. The grave seems to be the only one in this location, although there are some small, seemingly cut stones protruding from the ground in the area of the Condon headstone, which may indicate other burials. Jane Condon's headstone indicates that she was born in 1758 and died in 1816.

As documented in "Edie's Book: Thoughts, Memories & Folklore from Trinity Bay, Newfoundland," written by Edith Burrage in 2003, the stone then read "Sacred to the memory of Jane, wife of John Condon, who departed this life June 22, 1816 age 58 years." It also contained a verse which read "Death can't disjoin, whom Christ hath joined in love, From life to death, and death to life above. In Heaven a happier place frail things despise, Live well to gain in future life the prize." John Condon and his wife would have been among the early settlers to New Perlican. Local oral tradition maintains that John Condon lost most of his family, moved away, and never came back.

In 1827, Bishop John Inglis (the son of Charles Inglis, the first Anglican bishop in North America) came from Halifax to St. John's by ship. The bishop covered 3000 miles in his travels, visiting Conception Bay, Trinity Bay and Notre Dame Bay, and along the way meeting Shanawdithit, the last of the Beothuk (Origin 5).

While in Trinity Bay, the Bishop of Nova Scotia visited New Perlican on June 19, 1827. The church was at that point unfinished, so it remained unconsecrated, but Inglis confirmed 54 people living in the area. No burial ground was noted, though Inglis did consecrate the church and burying ground in nearby Heart's Content the following day (Scott 789). Later, Bishop Inglis wrote, "Tuesday, June 19th, I landed at nine in (New Perlican) where a numerous congregation of whom 54 were confirmed and addressed. I urged

the people to complete their church all the materials for which were collected.”

Work on the church was either complete or had progressed enough for the building to be consecrated by 1832. An 1877 “List of missions of the Church of England in Newfoundland and Labrador” notes that “The first church at New Perlican was dedicated to St. Mark, in 1832” (JJC 12). The exact location of this first St. Mark’s is yet unknown, though it is presumed to be somewhere near the cemetery. According to local oral tradition, “The first Anglican church in New Perlican was built on a hill in 1834 and was named St. Marks. This church suffered a minor fire when a flanker from the chimney landed on the shingles and started a fire. The fire was soon controlled and the church was repaired” (Penney).

The oldest intact dated headstone in St. Mark’s cemetery itself is from circa 1835. It marks the grave of Elizabeth Mitchell, born 1811, who died 12 December 1835. Another headstone may date to 1800, but this cannot be determined for certain, as the date has worn off. The names on that stone are Martha Pittman, wife of Charles, and her infant son William.

St. Mark’s was active throughout the 1840s and ‘50s, and an inscription contained in a bible in the present Anglican Church reads “Presented to the Church of St. Mark, New Perlican by Rev. T.F.H. Bridger, M.A., Ecclesiastical Commissary and Dean of Avalon, September 17th, 1842.” The Morning Courier newspaper reports that during the Legislative Council debate on an Education Bill, held Monday May 9th, 1853, that the Hon W. Thomas in his speech noted 205 Episcopalians and 23 Wesleyans (possibly children?) living in New Perlican (Legislative 1).

The 1877 list of missions lists one consecrated cemetery for New Perlican, and a second St. Mark’s church, this one built in 1863 (JJC 13). The map of the diocese included in that report notes that the parish at New Perlican served two settlements at that time.

By the late 1800s, local newspapers were carrying notices of deaths and burials at the cemetery. As an example, the Harbor Grace Standard noted on 1 August, 1874:

Died.—At New Perlican, on Thursday,
July 16th, Mr. Albert Pitman, aged 60 years
The deceased was a much respected native and resident of New Perlican,

who, after a lingering illness, born with a peaceful and tranquil mind, has departed from among us, leaving a deeply attached and bereaved wife and family, many sorrowing relatives, and a large circle of regretting friends to mourn their loss. The deceased, being also a late esteemed member of the Society of United Fishermen of Heart's Content, they, on Sunday, July 19, ult., assembled to the number of about 160 (many being absent at the fisheries) and walked to New Perlican, when, after listening to an appropriate discourse from the worthy Chaplain, the remains of the lately deceased brother were moved to their final resting place. The brethren of the order present, before retiring, gave their last token of respect— viz, Fishermen's honors.

One of the burials in the cemetery is that of Edward Bickford, born 1830. Bickford was apparently a teacher in the community, as the Journal of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland (98) notes: "FRIDAY, 10th April, 1885. The following petitions were severally presented, received- and read: — By Mr. Boyd, From the inhabitants of New Perlican, on the subject of an annuity to Edward Bickford, an old and deserving Schoolmaster." Sadly, the schoolmaster died 6 June, 1885, so any annuity he received was only shortly enjoyed.

By the 1880s, both the cemetery and church were insufficient for the community, with the old church being in need of extensive repairs (see Rowe). Again, according to local oral tradition, "St. Mark's Anglican church was destroyed by a fire in 1886. The third Anglican, St. Augustine's Anglican church, was started on January 1, 1886" (Penney).

The new church was consecrated 29 June, 1886. The Evening Telegram (Lord 4) for July 7th of that year reported:

Midway between Heart's Content and New Perlican there is a turn in the road, from which many of the visitors obtained their first view of the building. The scene which presented itself, no doubt, astonished them. There, where only a few months ago stood nothing but brushwood and the stunted fir and spruce, could be seen a handsome church, with nave and chancel, tower and spire, complete. Before it the still, clear water of New Perlican pond was reflecting its grateful form, whilst beyond it lay the waters of the harbour. But it was not until the visitors reached the brow of a hill in New Perlican itself that the church could be properly seen by them. Then, indeed, not only the thoroughly church-like

appearance of the building, but also its fine, open situation became at once visible. Built about three hundred yards from the main road, and approached by a good broad road near by—the free labor of the people—its position is seen to be most excellent. As the visitor leaves the main road for the church he passes beneath a lichgate, bearing the inscription, “Holiness to the Lord,” put there to remind him of the reverence due to the place where it has vouchsafed the Lord to place His name.

With the new church came a new cemetery, located on Beaver Pond Road. The Diocesan Magazine for April, 1892 announced the new cemetery thusly:

A new cemetery has long been felt to be a pressing need here, but till lately we have never succeeded in finding a suitable place. We have, however, at length been successful, having purchased from Mr. John Luther a piece of ground admirably adapted for that sacred purpose. A short time ago a Committee was formed to draw up rules, which were subsequently adopted at a general meeting. On Monday, March 14, a large number of men assembled to begin the work of clearing. A special service, consisting of psalms, prayers, the doxology and benediction was said on the ground. It is hoped that the work so well begun may be brought to a successful termination, and that ere long a neat cemetery may be solemnly set apart by the act of Consecration.

As a side note, the first Methodist graveyard was established in the community around the same time. A 1925 History of Methodism (Johnson 290) reports:

The first church in New Perlican was opened in the year 1893 and is now used as a day school. The present church was opened in 1914. Before Methodism had any church or graveyard in this place, a corpse was carried on horseback to Carbonear, fifteen miles distant, for burial.

After the 1890s, the old St. Mark’s Cemetery fell into disuse, and by 2012, the cemetery found itself at threat from neglect and encroaching ATV trails. Folklorist Lisa Wilson met with some members of Heritage New Perlican in November 2012 for a preliminary walk-through, and then helped organize a clean-up project for 22 June 2013. Before the clean-up, it was believed that some previously unrecorded headstones could have been hidden throughout the site. Several community members turned up to help with the removal of the tall grass and shrubbery that had been obscuring a cluster of headstones.

In a few hours, 13 headstones were revealed, most of which were from the mid-19th century. Encouraged by this work, St. Mark's Anglican Cemetery, New Perlican, was designated as a Municipal Heritage Site by the Town of New Perlican Regular Council Meeting Motion #2013-062 July 13, 2013.

In October 2018, a group of Memorial University archaeology graduate and undergraduates, with folklore, sociology, history, business, and anthropology students travelled to New Perlican as a collaboration between the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Heritage New Perlican. Students and community volunteers continued with the clearing and removal of brush, while a smaller group of archaeology students started at the lower end of the site to map the stones, under the direction of archaeologist Dr. Shannon Lewis-Simpson.

By the end of the afternoon the recording team had mapped out less than a quarter of the site as a whole, but had managed to record the locations of 58 gravestones. This included three stones carved from local slate, with inscriptions. Archaeologist Robyn Lacy blogged about the event, writing,

Made from local stones, these grave markers were likely either carved in a nearby community to New Perlican. Records showed that there were slate cutters from Wales in Newfoundland dating back centuries, brought over to work the slate that the British were already aware was present on the island. It makes sense that a gravestone carving culture would spring up from that, and I'm not surprised to see these samples at the site! My favourite is the little red stone that reads 'S W' in uneven, capital letters. In addition to these, there were several headstones carved by A. Smith, a gravestone carver from St. John's who was the first to import marble from New England for gravestones in the early 1800s, and MacKim, another carver from St. John's who also worked with imported marble and limestone (Lacy 2017a).

Lacy, along with Dr. Shannon Lewis-Simpson and Ian Petty, returned to the site later in October, to continue with the mapping project. That second day of mapping brought the total of mapped stones to 135, with the lower third of the site completed (Lacy 2017b).

Volunteers with Heritage New Perlican have compiled a list of existing and potential burials for the site, based on extant tombstone inscriptions and parish burial records. Approximately 59 named individuals have been identified for the cemetery (see Table 1), which represents only about 44% of

the stones mapped to date. Clearly the number of burials in the cemetery is much higher than what is presented in the Heritage New Perlican list, and additional mapping and recording is needed to fill in gaps in the data.

TABLE 1 -

Burial data compiled by Heritage New Perlican for St. Mark's Old Anglican Cemetery on Scott's Hill. Revised June 1, 2016.

NAME	YEAR BORN	YEAR DIED	AGE
Bemister, R.J.	1864, Sept.	1867, Mar. 6th	2 yrs
Bickford, Edward	1830, ++	1885, June 6th	55 yrs
Bugden, George	1868,	1889, July 23rd	21 yrs
Burrage, Jane **	1854,	1891, Aug. 1	37 yrs
Burridge, Emeline	1862,	1889, Nov 8th	27 yrs
Calahan, Ellen **	1888,	1892, Jan. 23	4 yrs 3mos
Callahan, Emily Anne	1890,	1891, April 23rd	8 mos
Etheridge, James	1888,	1889, Aug. 13th	13 mos
Etheridge, Priscilla **	1830,	1891, June 28	61 yrs
Etheridge, Sarah S. **	1888,	1891, June 4	3 ½ yrs
Fisher, John	?	1889, June 11th	?
Fisher, Robert J.	1886,	1889, Nov. 15th	3 yrs
Grant, May	?	1889, May 11th	?
Grant, Sarah	1810,	1890, Jan. 11th	80 yrs
Hefford, James	1817,	1891, Feb. 17th	74 yrs
Hiscock, Jesse	1860,	1890, Aug. 1st	30 yrs
Hiscock, Jessee	1890, (son of James & Emma	1892, May 21st	2 yrs
Hobbs, Isabella	1818, ++	1891, Nov. 10th	73 yrs
Howell, Grace	1799, ++	1882, Sept. 20th	63 yrs
Howell, Peter James?	1839, (son of Grace) ++	1858, Nov. 4th	19 yrs 7 mos
Luther, George	1825,	1889, Dec. 26th	64 yrs
Martin, Llewellyn Jones	1888,	1890, Oct. 10th	1 yr 5 mos
Merchant, Ann	1822, ++	1878, Nov. 9th	56 yrs
Merchant, Elizabeth	1831,	1869, June	38 yrs
Merchant, Elizabeth May	1841, ++	1882, June 8th	41 yrs
Mitcham, Jacob	1891,	1891, April 29th	2 mos
Mitchell, Elizabeth	1811, ++	1835, Dec. 12th	24 yrs
Northover, John **	1844,	1891, June 13th	47 ½ yrs

Northover, Matthew	? ++	1884, March 10th	?
Old, Dorothy **	1824,	1891, June 6th	67 yrs
Pearcey, Joshua	?	1889, April 22nd	?
Philips, Dorothy **	1821,	1892, Apr 25	71 yrs
Piercey, George	1821,	1890, July 9th	69 yrs
Piercy, Mary	1824,	1890, Sept 23rd	66 yrs
Pinsent, Richard **	1891,	1892, Jan 7	6 mos.
Pittman, Albert	1814, ++	1874, July 17th	60 yrs
Pittman, Corbett	1805, ++	1854, June 14th	49 yrs
Pittman, Martha	1779, ++	1800, Aug. 11th	21 yrs
Pittman, Sarah	1772, ++	1864, Apr. 18th	92 yrs
Pittman, William	? ++	?	11 months
Pittman, William	1838,	1882, Sept. 20th	44 yrs
Pittman, William	?	?	68 yrs
Pitts, Amy **	1811, ++	1893, Dec. 2nd	82 yrs
Seaward, Edgar Charles	1888,	1889, Nov. 14th	1 yr
Seaward, James **	1830,	1892, Feb. 18	62 yrs
Seaward, Susannah	1862,	1889, Nov. 14th	27 ½ yrs
Seward, Anne	1830, ++	1889, July 1	59 yrs
Seward, Samuel	1812,	1893, Jan 15	81 yrs 9 mos
Smith, Elizabeth	1892,	1893, Jan 11	6 mos
Snook, Alfred **	1824,	1891, Dec. 30	67 yrs
Snook, George **	1818,	1891, Aug. 4	73 yrs
Snook, George Wm.	1892,	1893, Jan 11	4 mos
Snook, James	1889,	1889, Sept 16th	6 mos.
Swansborough, J. C.	1852, ++	1856, June 30th	3 yrs 11 mos
Swansborough, W. H.	++	1862, June 22nd	
Warren, Cicely **	1862,	1891, May 25th	29 yrs
Warren, Elizabeth Jane	++	1866, Dec.	
Warren, Mary	?	1889, Dec. 1st	?
White, Sarah Hobbs	1880,	1891,	11 yrs
From Vital Statistics online starting 1891 **			
Stone or Cross on the Grave ++			

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See Also:

Cemetery records, New Perlican

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